

In 1996, I vehemently opposed the "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act," which changed our nation's welfare system, because it removed an important safety net for the poor and the most vulnerable in our society. I still hold these views today.

However, I support the "Next Step in Reforming Welfare Act" because --unlike the 1996 law-- this new legislation improves our national safety net and actually helps the poor and most vulnerable in our society. This bill increases funding for TANF, redirects the goal of the program to that of poverty reduction, rewards work, provides new funding for work support programs, like child care, and encourages states to better assist hard-to-serve TANF recipients.

The "Next Step in Reforming Welfare Act" increases the TANF block grant by inflation, and more than doubles child care funding so that more families are able to go to work. This legislation appropriately redirects the goal of the TANF program to reducing poverty. This replaces the draconian idea that the purpose of welfare is to kick TANF recipients off the rolls as fast as possible. The bill accomplishes this by making child poverty reduction an explicit goal of TANF and by providing \$150 million each year in incentive grants to states who reduce child poverty.

Another important focus of this legislation is its commitment to increasing quality childcare to current and former TANF recipients. The bill triples the portion of the Child Care Development Block Grant available for this purpose. Additionally, the bill requires that all TANF funding used for childcare only be used in facilities that meet state health and safety standards. It also increases the age for which childcare must be made available to children from 6 to 13 years old.

This bill directs resources to TANF recipients who suffer from disabilities, substance abuse, domestic violence, and lack of proficiency in English. It requires states to assess and screen recipients to determine if they need rehabilitative or educational services to go to work. It also provides families in these situations a chance to get on their feet by allowing rehabilitative services to count as a work activity for six months.

These changes in TANF are a first step toward improving our welfare system so that it truly helps poor working families and gives them not just a safety net, but also a springboard out of poverty. I hope that my colleagues in the House will work with me to make TANF a program we

can all be proud of.